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C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 001091

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TALMON PLANS PAVE THE WAY FOR CONSTRUCTION OF NEW
SETTLEMENT HOUSING IN THE WEST BANK

REF: TEL AVIV 1356

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Israeli NGO Bimkom provided PolOff a copy of the plan deposited last April to expand Talmon settlement (reftel). The plan includes capacity for 300 total residential units. NGOs report that approximately 60 residential units illegally constructed in the area would be retroactively legalized under the plan. NGOs Bimkom and Peace Now have filed objections to the plan. Residents of the local village told PolOff June 25 that expansion of Talmon settlement will aggravate restrictions they already face in accessing their agricultural land.

Plan allows for 300 units
in Talmon settlement

¶2. (C) On April 20, 2009, the Israeli Civil Administration deposited for public review Plan 235/3 titled "Changes in the Plan for Area RJ-5 in Talmon Settlement 'Givat HaBrecha'." (reftel). ConGen Jerusalem has acquired a copy of the text of the plan from NGO Bimkom, and confirms that the plan's capacity is 300 residential units. According to Alon Cohen-Lifshitz of Bimkom, the proposed plan paves the way for the retroactive legalization of approximately 60 residential units that have been illegally constructed, and allows for future construction of approximately 240 additional residential units.

NGOs file objections to plan

¶3. (C) NGOs Peace Now and Bimkom have filed objections to Plan 235/3. Hagit Ofra of Peace Now told PolOff on June 26 that the plan "rewards" illegal construction and is contrary to the GOI's Roadmap commitments. Cohen-Lifshitz told PolOff on June 25 that Bimkom and the Al Jania Village Council filed a joint objection to Plan 235/3, primarily on the grounds that the plan violates the principles of freedom of movement for the people of Al Jania village.

Peace Now: Barak gave "blanket" approval

¶4. (C) Peace Now's Ofra told PolOff June 26 that she understands that Israeli Minister of Defense (MOD) Ehud Barak gave a "blanket" approval for Plan 235/3, meaning that MOD approval is not needed at every step of the approval process. When asked what Peace Now intends to do if their objection is dismissed, Ofra said that they might take the case to the Israeli High Court of Justice.

Al Jania residents face restrictions
on access to agricultural land

15. (C) During a June 25 meeting, the Al Jania village chief explained that, since the 1980s, settlers from Talmon and Dolev settlements have prevented access to approximately 10,000 dunums of land belonging to Palestinian families of Al Jania, leaving the villagers with access to only 2,000 dunums of land. Approval of the proposed plan would expand the footprint of Talmon settlement, which, according to NGO contacts and residents of Al Jania village, will further restrict Palestinian villagers' access to agricultural land. A security gate at the entrance to the "Talmon A" area of Talmon settlement currently prevents Al Jania residents from using the only road that leads to much of their agricultural land. The village chief said that all of the approximately 200 families in Al Jania have land ownership documents.

Comment

16. (C) Per reftel, we understand that the MOD has stated that MOD Barak will not allow construction of any of the additional 240 housing units in the plan. Nevertheless, approval of the plan is a step towards new construction in Talmon, and this is certainly how it is perceived by Palestinians. The plan also creates the possibility that construction could be justified at some point in the future as "previously approved" rather than "new" construction activity.
WALLES